Qualities and Abilities of Effective and Confident Prevention Practitioners

Because effective prevention is rooted in changing social norms that support sexual violence, the qualities and abilities of effective prevention practitioners are informed by a deeply-rooted commitment to valuing equality and respect. With this said, the following points help place these qualities and abilities in context.

What guides prevention practitioners qualities and abilities?

• Promising practices, research, data, and available evidence-based strategies are constantly changing and developing. The qualities and abilities discussed in this resource may grow as the field does.

• Much like research and evidence, professional skills grow and change with time. Although some of the qualities are reflective of current knowledge and priorities, there are many qualities that are consistent best practice. Keep in mind that this list may grow and change as prevention research and practice grows and changes.

For the purposes of this resource *prevention practitioner* and *preventionist* are used interchangeably to refer to individuals engaging in social change efforts, community education and mobilization, technical assistance, and research

focused on preventing sexual violence in any and all forms. This could include, but is not limited to, state and territory coalition staff, Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) Coordinators, and individuals at community-based sexual assault centers. As with all language, these terms are fluid and are offered within this resource to provide a consistent understanding of individuals doing anti-sexual violence and anti-oppression work.

What are the qualities and abilities of effective prevention practitioners?

Using research on innovative practice and input from a set of national focus groups, several qualities and abilities of effective prevention practitioners were collected and are organized below (Townsend, 2012 and see the NSVRC's *Core Competencies of Sexual Violence Prevention Practitioners* for information on

focus groups findings). Each will be explained in further detail throughout the rest of the document.

• Ability to demonstrate foundational understanding of sexual violence and sexual violence-related issues;

• Ability to outline, list, or describe how and why sexual violence is a public health problem;

• Ability to make connections between anti-oppression work and sexual violence prevention accessible to their community;

• Ability to identify and implement foundational elements of program development, evaluation, and data analysis;

• Commitment to collaboration and trust in community partners to organize and sustain sexual violence prevention efforts;

• Personal attributes and characteristics of individuals that could support longevity and appropriate "fit" with the work of prevention.

Ability to demonstrate foundational understanding of sexual violence and sexual violence-related issues.

Since the issue of sexual violence is complex and varied, a foundational understanding is necessary for answering basic questions that may come from community members. A foundational understanding of sexual violence is key to being able to engage in prevention: familiarity with statistics, unique needs, and current gaps in knowledge will help when collaborating with community partners and developing prevention strategies. The skills and resources below are intended to outline some of the common areas of competence.

A. Describing the issue

Part of a foundational understanding is being able to define, describe, and provide examples of sexual violence to various audiences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided a number of resources, including online learning tools to assist preventionists in defining sexual violence and sexual violence prevention. These understandings are used as the keystone for many public health initiatives.

Sexual violence: Facts at a Glance (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/SV-DataSheet-a.pdf

VetoViolence: Principles of Prevention (HTML)

http://www.vetoviolence.org/pop

VetoViolence: Sexual Violence (HTML)

http://www.vetoviolence.org/education-sexual-violence.html

B. Comprehensive programming

Survivors of sexual violence may not only be present during implementation of prevention programming, but may also undoubtedly be a part of developing campaigns and community mobilization initiatives. Therefore, a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach to prevention embodies the need for comprehensive programming. These approaches work to keep the impact of trauma in the forefront of programming, as well as highlight the established resources of a community in the interest of collaboration and

valued partnership. For instance, issues such as poverty and housing are prime examples of how reducing the potentially negative aspects of having public discussions of sexual violence can be a part of prevention program development.

National Sexual Violence Resource Center Research Brief on Housing and Sexual Violence (PDF)

http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/ publications_NSVRC_ResearchBrief_housing- and-sexual-violence_0.pdf

Models for Developing Trauma-Informed Behavioral Health Systems and Trauma-Specific Services (PDF)

http://www.annafoundation.org/MDT.pdf

C. Knowledge about sexual harassment:
Sexual harassment prevention can open many doors for prevention practitioners – businesses, institutions of higher learning, and schools are eager to learn how to comply with state and federal laws and how to create safe and productive learning environments. Being able to outline examples of sexual harassment in various community settings such as

businesses, schools, college campuses, or public spaces can help in outreach efforts, as well as in developing strategies for various community settings:

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) offers a legal definition of sexual harassment (HTML).

http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm

Based on results of a national survey of 7th-12th graders in the Spring of 2011, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) report *Crossing the Line: Sexual harassment in schools reveals how common sexual harassment truly is among America's schools and how it impacts learning* (PDF).

http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/upload/CrossingTheLine.pdf

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape offers a comprehensive prevention curriculum for grades K-12 in *Sexual Harassment Prevention in Schools* **(PDF).** http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/file/TA/Sexual-Harassment-Prevention-in-Schools-Curriculum-Manual.pdf

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center created a resource outlining how gender and sexuality play a part in harassment and bullying of students in elementary, middle, and high school. *Addressing the Gendered Dimensions of Harassment and Bullying: What domestic and sexual violence advocates need to know* offers advocates suggestions for strengthening work in school communities (PDF).
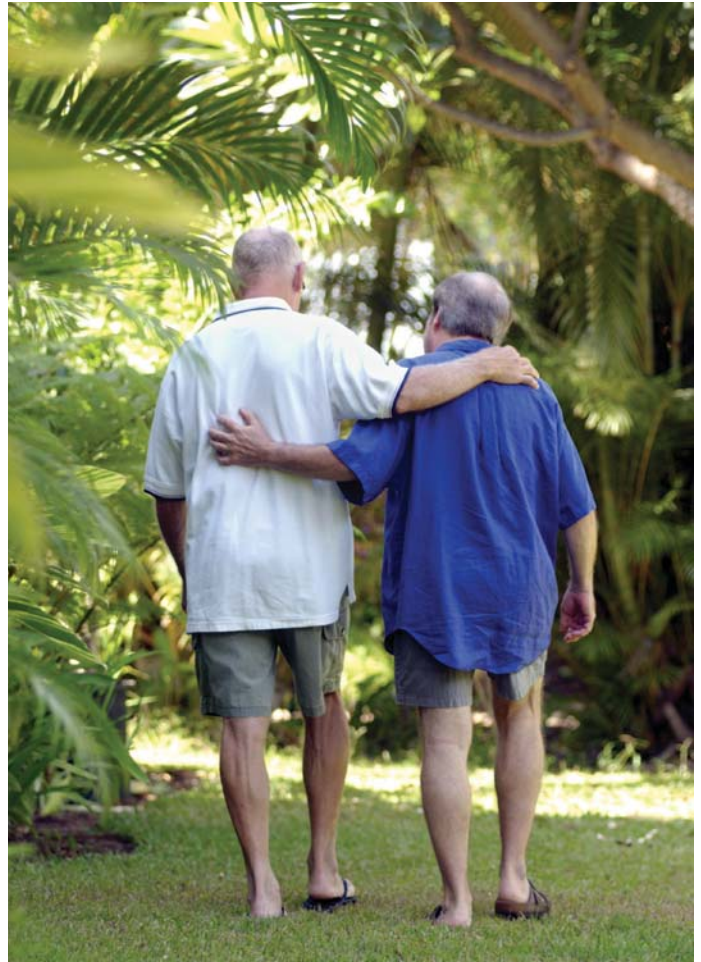
http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/CIB_HarassmentBullying.pdf

D. Confidentiality

The confidentiality and privilege within the counselor-survivor dynamic plays a part in understanding the overall system of survivor services. Although it may not seem like an aspect of prevention work, it is the responsibility of everyone in the anti-sexual violence movement to be able to explain to community partners and leaders how this is an important part of supporting survivors legally and emotionally. Confidentiality and the unique role of advocates support survivors, their significant others, and their communities through trust-building, communication, and mutual respect.

E. Healthy sexuality/healthy relationships

Promoting healthy sexuality and healthy relationship behaviors are strategies that show how social norms can begin to shift through individual behavior change. Once people have the skills and models, they have an opportunity to create change wherever they are. Prevention practitioners need to be comfortable discussing consent and consensual dynamics both within the context of sexual activity, as well as other non-sexual interactions.

The theme for Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2012 was healthy sexuality and there are a number of resources available to assist in organizing efforts, starting community discussions, and developing a social networking campaign (HTML). http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/resources

F. Mandated reporting

Part of the larger prevention puzzle includes information and training for mandated reporting. Mandated reporting is a practical way to begin discussions with community members; institutions have a legal obligation to report and be trained in reporting. States differ in legislation and policy on mandated reporting of child abuse, including who is a mandated reporter and the process of reporting to appropriate authorities. Below are resources to assist you in finding the laws in your area:

The United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families has a website that provides an overview of mandated reporting statutes, Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws (HMTL), as well as a State Statutes Search page that provides state-specific information on a variety of policy issues (HMTL).

http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_ policies/statutes/manda.cfm

http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_ policies/state/index.cfm?event=stateStatutes. showSearchForm

Break the Cycle released an Issue Brief, *Balancing Obligations: Serving Teen Victims and Mandated Reporting of Statutory Rape* that outlines areas of concern, practical implications, and resources for providers serving teen victims (PDF).

http://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/ files/pdf/ta-issue-brief-08-08.pdf

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) has a manual and PowerPoint presentation for sexual assault advocates on mandated reporting. These can be accessed through PCAR's website (HTML).

http://www.pcar.org/mandated-reporter- training

G. Knowledge on stalking

Preventionists may not encounter stalking as a pressing community issue or problem, but awareness can equip individuals with well-rounded and transferable qualities and abilities.

As part of the National Center for Victims of Crime's Stalking Resource Center (HTML), there are a number of resources including a Quiz to assess your knowledge on stalking (HTML).

http://www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center

http://stalkingawarenessmonth.org/quiz

Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence offers guidance on workplace polices for domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence and stalking (HTML).

http://www.workplacesrespond.org/learn/model-policy

H. Knowledge of Frameworks

Similar to the importance of understanding stalking, being able to discuss norms and frames can help preventionists interrupt patterns of behavior that reinforce victim-blaming. For example, when working with individuals, community organizations, or other systems, discussions of alcohol-facilitated sexual assault are often focused on making sure young women don't drink. It is important that preventionists feel comfortable and confident in redirecting such conversations to bystander engagement, healthy sexuality, or promoting alternative models of masculinity. These strategies place accountability on potential perpetrators and the community in general, rather than on reducing risk and emphasizing victimization.

I. People-first language

In order to stay genuine in the promotion of safe and respectful communities, prevention practitioners should consistently use people-first language. Using people-first language interrupts society's narrow view of individuals and communities. For example: "survivors with disabilities," "individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning [LGBTQ]," or "male survivors of child sexual abuse."

This language is rooted in the disability rights movement, but it is consistent with anti-oppression work of other movements and communities – including anti-sexual violence. The website Disability is Natural has a number of resources by Kathie Snow on People-First Language (PDF) and (PDF).

http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/images/PDF/pfl-sh09.pdf

http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/images/PDF/pflchart09.pdf

Ability to outline or describe how and why sexual violence is a public health problem

Discussing sexual violence as a community issue can help build interest and support for prevention initiatives. This may mean using a public health approach or framework to convey the importance of prevention and community mobilization. Preventionists must understand concepts of prevention and the public health approach, and be able to translate those principles into practice through mobilization and engagement.

A. Oppression

When thinking about the root causes of sexual violence, go beyond thinking of sexism alone – all systems of oppression contribute to violence and inequality. Lydia Guy's *Re-Visioning the Sexual Violence Continuum* gives activists a visual representation of how oppression infiltrates rape culture (PDF). This tool can serve as a base for connecting anti-oppression work and sexual violence prevention when discussing projects with others in your community.

http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/documents/RapeCulture2006.pdf

B. Guiding tools

It is important to have a number of tools to help organize or structure prevention work.

The social ecological model outlines the different levels that impact trends, attitudes, and behaviors. Individual, relationship, community, and societal norms must be addressed in order for sustainable change to take place (HTML).

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html

The Spectrum of Prevention **is a tool that aids communities in the development of a comprehensive, multi-level prevention strategy that goes beyond focusing on individuals, but instead focuses on systems and norms (PDF).**

http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Booklets_Sexual-Violence-and-the-Spectrum-of-Prevention_Towards-a-Community-Solution.pdf

When looking at studies and available research on prevention initiatives for substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, school failure, juvenile delinquency and violence, a group of researchers found nine principles that were evident in a majority of effective programs (Nation, Crusto, Wandersman, Kumpfer, Seybolt, Morrissey-Kane, & Davino, 2003). These nine principles increase the likelihood

of success and positive impact (PDF).

http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/
mentoring_4.pdf

C. Perceptions

The language used to talk about sexual violence and prevention can either open minds or close them. Understanding what people truly think about when they hear "sexual violence" can help prevention practitioners in program development and delivery.

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Frameworks Institute have been working on developing messages around sexual violence that are consistent and engage the general public in productive conversations around prevention (HTML).

http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/
sexualviolence.html

D. Social change

Preventionists should have a clear understanding of the world they are working toward. Promoting social action, healthy sexuality, policy change, and anti-oppression efforts give communities a new model. Talking about what not to do is important when providing preliminary education, but prevention happens in changing behaviors and social norms. Promoting health, wellness, consent, and respect encourages those changes.

Risk and protective factors are a basic introduction to investigating the areas where individuals, communities, and society have strengths and assets. This resource can help

discussions exploring those strengths (HTML).

http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/
sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html

The American College Health Association provides frameworks for doing prevention work on college campuses in Shifting the Paradigm: Primary prevention of sexual violence (PDF).

http://www.acha.org/sexualviolence/docs/
ACHA_PSV_toolkit.pdf

Ability to make connections between anti-oppression work and sexual violence prevention accessible to their community

Sexual violence prevention is intrinsically linked with ending all forms of oppression
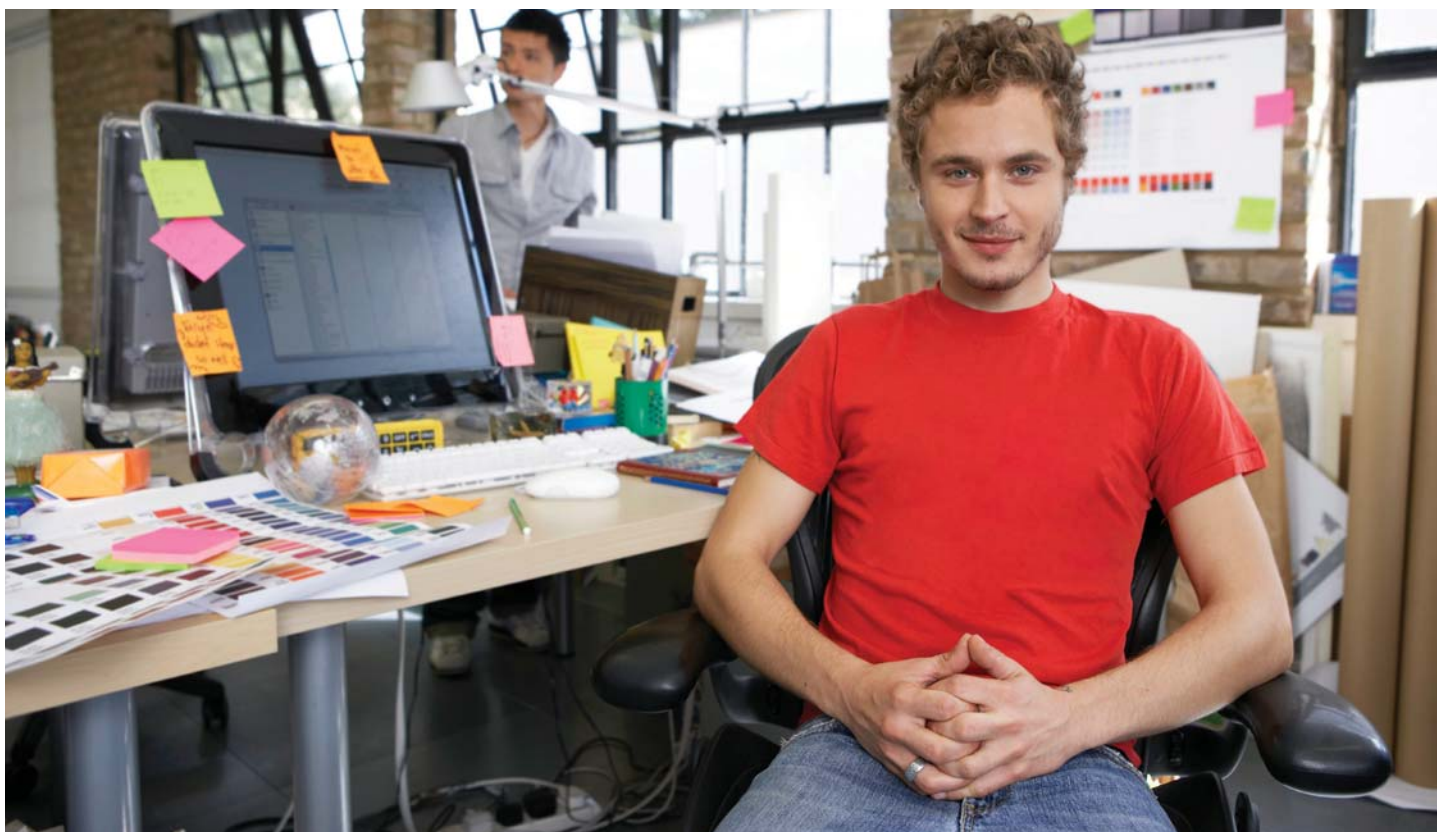
including sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, adultism, and ageism, among others. It is important that prevention initiatives acknowledge and address these inequalities. An example of this strategy would be hosting workshops for community partners focused on the connections between forms of oppression and sexual violence, as well as assisting them in developing community-based strategies to address priority issues in the community.

A. The YWCA of Greater Flint's online training manual for volunteers has a comprehensive overview of the connections between anti-oppression and anti-violence work (HTML).

http://volunteermanual.wordpress.com/2011/03/22/anti-oppression-theory/

B. The VAWNet Applied Research Paper Changing Perceptions of Sexual Violence Over Time outlines the evolution of the anti-sexual violence movement and highlights the importance of culturally-relevant prevention approaches (PDF).

http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/AR_ChangingPerceptions.pdf

After reviewing these introductory materials, topics for further exploration could include:

• Economic justice

• Faith and spirituality

• Global and border connections and politics

• Health care and access to competent services

• Language access

• Immigration

• Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) communities and gender expression

• Multi and trans-ethnic, racial and cultural identity

• Restoring sovereignty for Tribal and Indigenous Nations

Ability to identify and implement foundational elements of program development, evaluation, and data analysis

Part of doing effective prevention work is being able to measure effectiveness. Not everyone receives advanced degrees in statistics and evaluation; therefore there are many resources for making the evaluation process practical and accessible. Findings from an effective evaluation can help with program development, applying for funding, making recommendations to funders, and recruiting community support. Evidence that a prevention program has a positive impact can open many doors and assist in building a case for ongoing support.

A. Principles of effective prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a number of resources available for download or free by request on principles of effective prevention and strategies for implementation:

i. Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SVPrevention-a.pdf

ii. Rape Prevention and Education Grant Program: At A Glance (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/RPE%20AAG.pdf

iii. Preventing Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence in Racial/Ethnic Minority Communities: CDC's Demonstration Projects (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/Preventing_IPV_SV.pdf

Applying the Principles of Prevention: What Do Prevention Practitioners Need to Know About What Works? (PDF)

http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_4.pdf

B. Evaluation and Assessment

The CDC has documents exploring ways in which evidence can be conceptualized and gathered:

i. Measuring Bullying Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences: A Compendium of Assessment Tools(PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/BullyCompendium-a.pdf

ii. Understanding Evidence Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Understanding_Evidence-a.pdf

iii. Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness (PDF)

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Continuum%20Chart-a.pdf

Philantropy411 Blog post "10 Great Resources for Creating a Theory of Change" (HTML)

http://philanthropy411.wordpress.com/2010/03/29/theoryofchange/

The Aspen Institute's The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development (PDF)

http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/4/TOC_fac_guide.pdf

Commitment to collaboration and trust in community partners to organize and sustain sexual violence prevention efforts

In addition to being able to modify or cater the prevention message to a specific audience or community group, sustainable initiatives are only going to be developed when responsibility for ending sexual violence is handed over to the community. This requires some level of training and support, but trust and respect for community partners has to come into play. It is crucial that the value of community members is established from the beginning of any project. Community leaders and stakeholders should be involved from the development phase all the way through implementation, evaluation, and sustainment of the program. Prevention is not typically a "package deal" where it can be delivered to a community or group – effective prevention is truly about community ownership and accountability for solving the problem.

A. The Community Tool Box is a global resource for free information on essential skills for building healthy communities. It offers more than 7,000 pages of practical guidance in creating change and improvement (HTML).

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx

B. Several editions of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs' (WCSAP) newsletter, Partners in Social Change, offer practical guidance and resources on community mobilization and engagement:

i. Community Development as a Foundational Framework, Summer 2007 (PDF)

http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/documents/CommunityDevelopment2007.pdf

ii. Needs and Resources Assessment, Winter 2008 (PDF)

http://www.wcsap.org/sites/www.wcsap.org/files/uploads/documents/NeedsResourceAssessment2008.pdf

iii. Revisiting the Seven Steps of Community Development, Spring 2008 (PDF)

http://www.wcsap.org/sites/www.wcsap.org/files/uploads/documents/CommunityDevelopment2008.pdf

C. Rooted in social action research and community accountability, The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault and 11 of the city's sexual assault programs are taking part in a six-year citywide project to prevent sexual violence. The goal of Project ENVISION is to change the social norms that promote and

permit sexual violence in NYC so that there will be a reduction in perpetration of sexual violence (HTML).

http://www.svfreenyc.org/programs_prevention.html

Personal attributes and characteristics of individuals that could support longevity and appropriate "fit" with the work of prevention

In a recent survey of innovative prevention programs, it was found that effective preventionists commonly share a number of personal qualities that help make them successful (Townsend, 2012). Some of these can be learned or acquired through practice and mentorship, but many are qualities that bring individuals to prevention and therefore aren't "trainable" necessarily. Leadership and individuals hiring for prevention practitioners should keep these in mind when creating job descriptions or conducting interviews. [For more guidance on hiring effective practitioners see *Guidance for Hiring, Training, and Supporting Community Prevention Practitioners*].

• **Passion for social justice and sexual violence prevention.** Although it is listed above, the passion for doing prevention work can be what motivates or energizes preventionists. Learning theoretical and practical implementation of prevention makes the work, but a driving internal force makes the work doable.

• **Visionary and/or "big picture" orientation to problem-solving.** Effective practitioners must be part of two states of being: focused on how activities and programs are changing behaviors, while keeping all efforts in a long-term context or "bigger" picture. This wide scope helps keep things running smoothly and consistently.

• **Ability to build collaborative partnerships.** Since community mobilization and engagement is built on collaboration and equal partnership, preventionists' approach to prevention should reflect this framework.

• **Realistic expectations and patience.** Collaboration, prevention, and social justice are all long-term, slow processes that prevention practitioners should be able to place their individual or agency work within the evolution of the anti-sexual violence movement.

• **Organizational skills and the ability to balance while multitasking.** Since prevention and social change are multi-faceted problems that require multi-faceted solutions, preventionists often have to have many projects going on at one time. This juggling act (as it can feel from time to time) needs someone who can be organized and on top of various deadlines and elements. "Organizational skills" can mean lots of different things – people have their own style of keeping things arranged, but the most important thing is that deliverables are achieved, projects are appropriately prioritized, and progress is made.
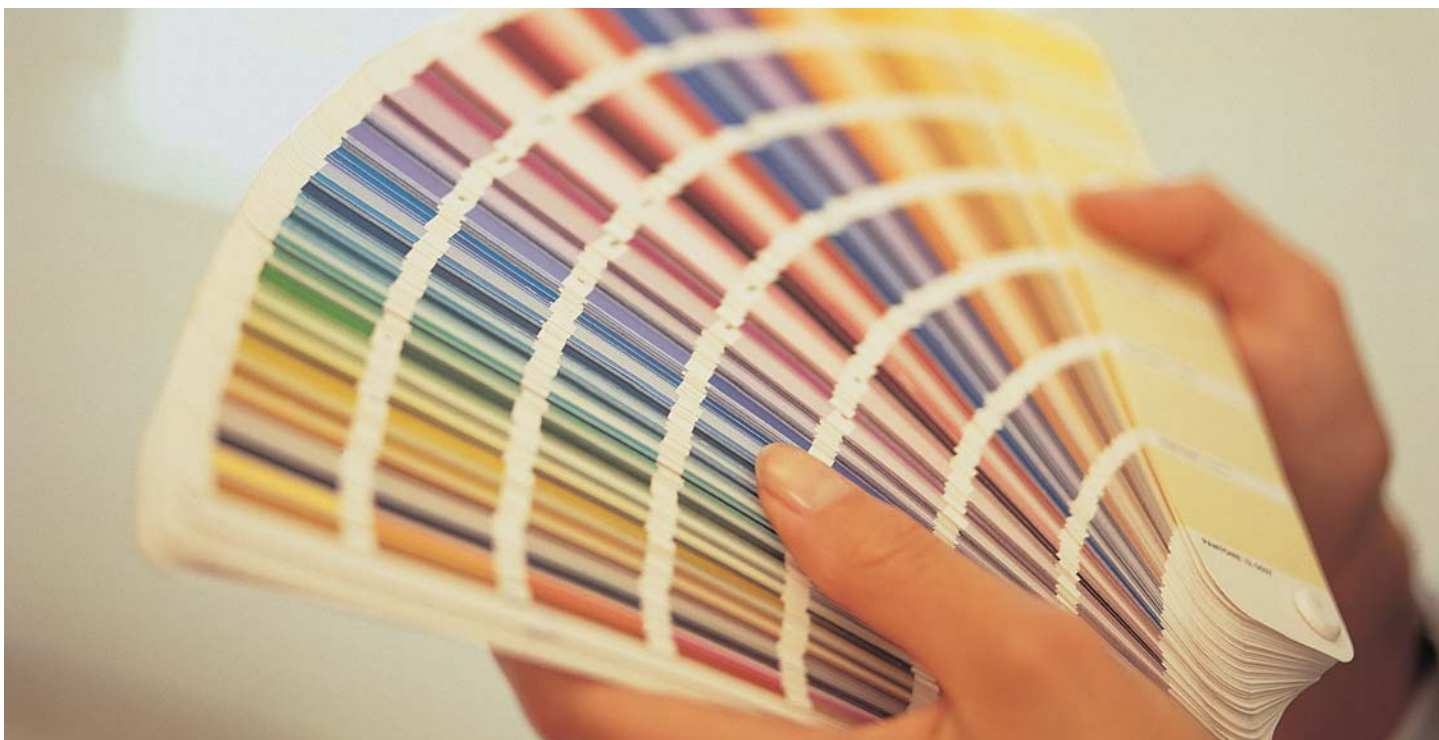
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This resource was created with the insight and expertise of **Stephanie Townsend, Ph.D.** Dr. Townsend has worked in the movement to end sexual violence for 19 years as both a practitioner and researcher. She began by working for community-based rape crisis and prevention programs in Michigan, California and Texas. Additionally, she served on the boards of directors of the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and on the advisory board of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault.

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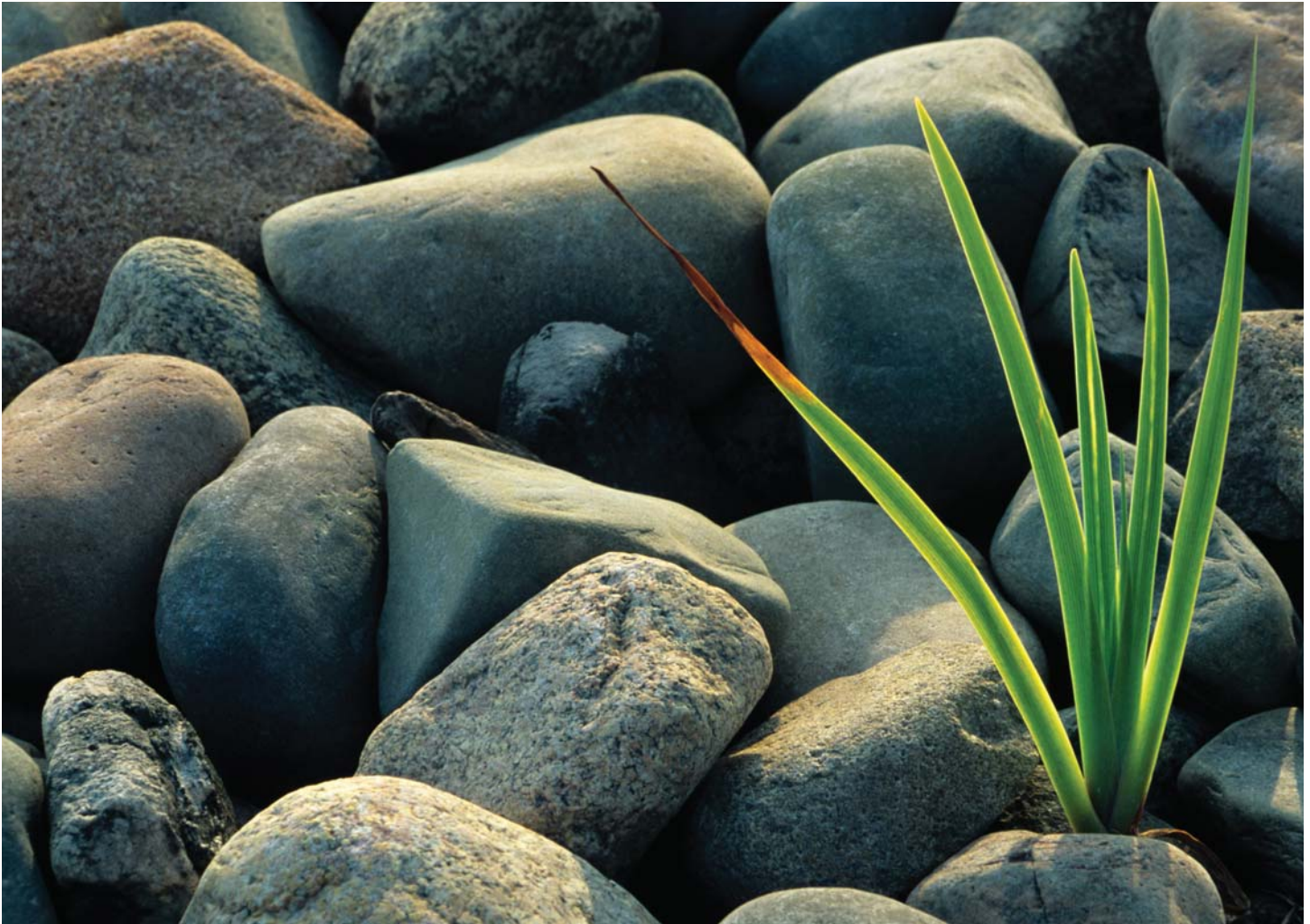
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